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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, March 19, 1931.

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In 344
HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "The Home Dressmaker Selects Her Tools." Information approved by
the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletin available: "Fitting Dresses and Blouses."

The little bride across the street came in this morning carrying a large flat notebook under her arm and holding three long pencils that looked as if she intended to write volumes. She had a very business-like appearance, so much so that I began to wonder whether she had given up housekeeping.

"You look," I told her, "exactly like a successful authoress:. Not that I've ever known a real authoress. But I'm sure I know exactly how one should look."

"They don't call themselves authoresses anymore, Aunt Sammy. At least that's what I've heard, but I never met a real one either. I understand, though, that modern authoresses call themselves writers."

"I'm sorry about that. The longer word sounds much more imposing and seems to go with a large black notebook and three purple pencils. I've heard that purple is a color that inspires people to write sonnets. But I should say, from the size of your notebook, that you are going in for novel writing or for biography. Just to think. All this change on a March morning. And you were such a promising little housekeeper, too."

"Gracious, Aunt Sammy, I can't tell whether you are teasing me or whether you are jumping to conclusions. I never dreamed of becoming a writer -- not since I was sixteen anyway, and wrote a story called 'Sir Galahad Comes to East Aurora.' I never dreamed of giving up housekeeping. Who would get Bill's meals if I began writing novels? Who would keep my kitchen shining and water the ivy in the dining room window? Oh, no, Aunt Sammy. I'm still a housekeeper, not a writer, especially not an authoress. This notebook I brought with me because I wanted to write down some things and not forget them. I came over to ask you about dressmaking tools and here we've been wasting three whole minutes talking nonsense."

"Are you planning to take up dressmaking then?"

"Indeed I am. One of these days I intend to be a perfect genius at making my own clothes. I've always enjoyed sewing, you know, but I never went at it seriously. Now, I want my friends to remark when they see me go by; 'Isn't she dressed smartly? Yet she scarcely spends a cent on her clothes. How does she do it?'"

"Well, perhaps you're going to ask too much of me. Homemade clothes are often less expensive, to be sure, but unless one makes a business of home sewing and is willing to study good methods and learn from experience, clothes may come out with a homemade look."

"That's just why I came over to see you, Aunt Sammy. I'm very serious about this venture. Very serious. Of course, I want to start right, so I came to ask you what tools a successful home dressmaker should have. Necessary small equipment first, and then, if I'm successful, I'll add the larger equipment as I can afford it."

The bride sat down and opened her notebook. She certainly was in earnest. And she was right. Good tools suitable for the job are necessary for any efficient work. If skill is to be attained, carefully selected equipment is necessary. All sorts of articles are on the market today to lighten the work of the homemaker. Which shall she choose?

My little friend told me that in her small house she couldn't have a whole sewing room, but she did intend to have a sewing nook or corner in the large room upstairs. This corner she intended to cut off from view by a large three-panel screen. The screen was to be decorative on one side and useful on the other side. Pockets to hold sewing articles were to be fastened on the inside.

Certain tools are necessary even for the beginner at dressmaking. First, on the list is a pair of sharp shears made of good steel. It pays to buy a good pair, so that they can be sharpened occasionally and will stay in good condition. Is there anything more annoying than a poor dull pair of shears that makes cutting seem like chewing at the fabric? When you have a good pair, keep them carefully just for sewing. Hide them from the family if necessary. Don't let little Percy use them to cut cardboard or tin, and don't let Samantha take them to the garden when she goes out for a bouquet for the dinner table. Try out the shears at the store. Do they fit your hand comfortably and not cramp your fingers? For dressmaking, it is best to buy a pair at least seven inches long.

The thimble? Yes, even this small article is worth consideration. It should fit the finger and not be sharp on the edge. I like celluloid thimbles. They are light and inexpensive. If I lose one I can buy another. Of course, silver and gold thimbles are far better looking, but there is a great difference in price. Brass is a poor choice since it may stain the finger.

A handy tape measure should be sixty inches long with numbers starting at each end on the opposite sides. This makes it possible to use either end. If one end of the tape measure is stiffened, it is convenient for measuring hems, facings and so forth. My next door neighbor has inserted a small corset steel in one end of her tape measure and sewed it firmly in position so that it cannot slip.

Among the smallest items are needles, pins and tailor's chalk.

To start with, an assortment of needles in packages of standard sizes running from sizes 5 to 10 will be enough. Oh, yes. You might add a few tape needles also to this collection. Since so many pins are needed, it is most convenient to have them for dressmaking in a quarter-pound box rather than the usual paper. As for chalk for marking, be sure you get real chalk which brushes off easily. Never a wax or grease chalk.

How many things so far? Six.

There are a few other articles I'd like to mention. One is a good-sized tracing wheel, made of the best steel so that the prongs will not bend nor become too blunt for efficient marking. Then, a lapboard or a table of soft wood on which to lay the pattern and use the tracing wheel. A ruler or a yard stick is also needed, and, if you own one of those nice carpenter's squares, you'll find it handy.

I hardly need to mention also that a well-padded ironing board, a sleeve board and a light-weight, smooth iron are helps for any sewing corner. If possible, have the board set in the wall where you can fold it up when not in use. Even if you have another ironing board downstairs in the kitchen or laundry, this one upstairs will save time and steps.

My little friend, the bride, fortunately, owns her own sewing machine. Every woman who does the family sewing knows how much this piece of equipment is needed. Someday soon I mean to chat about getting the best service from your sewing machine. But there isn't time today.

I do want to mention, though, a few of the "extras" for the sewing corner. A dress form is one of the greatest conveniences. You don't have to buy an expensive commercial form with mechanical adjustment devices just for your own use at home. Nonadjustable forms may be purchased at various prices or you can make a form to your own measurements.

To keep your spools of thread in order you will, of course, need a basket or a box or a convenient little rack. Make yourself a small pin cushion with a thimble case attached. Dressmakers, often have these little cases made to fasten on their belts. Hair is a good filling for the pin cushion because it is light and doesn't mat.

If you don't own a full length mirror, save your pennies and buy one. Think what a satisfaction it will be to be able to see the new dress from collar to hem in all stages of construction!

Tomorrow: "Linoleum Floors."

